



Region Four Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
January 7, 2005

Decision Notice For Proposed Heritage Park Unit Improvements Project

Proposed Action:

The project modifies the existing Heritage Unit of Giant Springs State Park to meet the requirements and specifications of the National Park Service Corps of Discovery II (Lewis & Clark) traveling exhibit to be hosted by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks during the "Explore the Big Sky" signature event, June 25 through July 4, 2005

Great Falls is one of 18 communities across the nation that will host the Corps II exhibit during the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial. The Heritage Park venue offers an opportunity to set up this remarkable exhibit in an aesthetically pleasing location, close to other attractions such as Giant Springs, the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, and the River's Edge Trail. Interpretive programming offered at the exhibit by local and visiting experts will enhance the public's understanding and enjoyment of the Lewis & Clark story.

The following specific actions would be taken:

- 1) The entrance to the Heritage Unit will be moved approximately 250 to the west in order to establish a level and more prominent entrance into the main Heritage Unit parking areas.
- 2) An existing asphalt parking area will be enlarged by approximately 9,000 square feet. Concrete curb and gutters will be installed to accommodate the tents and trailers which comprise the Corps II exhibit.
- 3) Landscaping will be done to improve the appearance of the entrance and exhibit pad.
- 4) Installation of ADA accessible parking.
- 5) Installation of a new walk and landscaping.
- 6) Realignment of the park loop road to enhance the curve radius for larger vehicles.
- 7) Installation of a new 240V 3-phase 400A power riser.
- 8) Installation of appropriate traffic and directional signs.

The proposed action will not result in any closure or interruption of the Giant Springs Road. One lane may be closed temporarily, but traffic will be allowed unrestricted

passage. The construction work will be conducted between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., generally on weekdays. The construction of the parking lot will not disturb any soils contaminated with toxic waste from the old silver smelter.

Throughout the design and construction process FWP intends to make these modifications permanent and actions taken will augment the future uses of the park identified in the *Giant Springs Area Management Plan*.

Decision:

Based on the analysis in the EA, I have decided to proceed with this project.

There were three comments received from the public: two supported the proposed action, and one presented a few questions which are answered in this Decision.

I have reviewed the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

This action is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the FWP Director in writing, and postmarked within 30 days of the date of this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how appellant has previously commented to the Department or participated in the decision making process, and lay out how FWP might address the concerns in the appeal.

Heritage Park Unit Comments:

The following quotes from the public comments:

1. *"As the Executive Director of the Montana Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commission I can say that I have been working closely with the National Park Service over the past number of months as they have made plans to host the Corps II traveling exhibit in Great Falls during the Explore the Big Sky National Signature Event. I would agree that the Giant Springs area is a near perfect venue for the Corps II exhibit. The proposed infrastructure improvements would not only add to this host location, but would become a lasting legacy for Great Falls for having been one of the 18 Montana host communities for Corps II during Montana's Lewis & Clark Bicentennial."*

Clint Blackwood, Executive Director, Montana Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commission, E-mail dated November 3, 2004

2. *"We are pleased that the Corps of Discovery II Exhibit can be located in the park. It will be fully accessible to users of the River's Edge Trail. The alternative proposed site, at the MSU/GF College of Technology campus, does not have good bike/pedestrian access. The Heritage Unit is linked with one of the most popular and well used segments of the urban trail system in Great Falls. We expect many trail users to enjoy this exhibit during its stay at Heritage."*

"We are pleased that the developments to accommodate the exhibit will improve the road access to the Heritage Unit, as the current steep entrance to the East has never been satisfactory either from a functional standpoint or as a means of showcasing the park to visitors. Improving the curbing, extending the asphalt parking and adding the 240V service will also be of lasting benefit. These improvements provide for new opportunities down the road for other innovative uses for the Heritage Unit."

Doug Wicks, Recreation Trails, Inc., E-mail dated November 4, 2004

3. *"Is the construction of the new entrance into Heritage State Park going to interrupt using Giant Springs Road for the families that live at the hatchery and for hatchery related traffic in general?"*

"Is construction going to be in any area that has been classified as having toxic waste from the old silver smelter? Concerns here are from dust that would be blowing toward the hatchery residences."

"Would construction hours be limited to an 8 to 5 schedule, Monday thru Friday?"

Bruce Chaney, E-mail dated December 21, 2004

The Final Environmental Assessment may be viewed, or obtained from the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region Four, Great Falls, MT. If you have questions regarding this decision notice, or the final EA, please direct requests and questions to: Mr. Mike Aderhold, Region Four Supervisor, 4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, MT 59405, (406) 454-5846.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Mike Aderhold, Region 4 Supervisor